



Land Use and Management Plan Potts Preserve

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The mission of the Southwest Florida Water Management District is to manage water and related natural resources to ensure their continued availability while maximizing environmental, economic and recreational benefits. Central to this mission is protecting and maintaining water and water related natural resources that provide the District's 16-county region with its existing and future water supply and maintaining the balance between the land-use needs of current and future users. The District acquires and manages lands in support of this mission, and the District's goals and areas of responsibility.

To ensure that District lands are used and managed in ways that are consistent with Florida Statutes and the District's mission and goals, the District adopts Land Use and Management Plans. These plans guide the use and management of properties for a specific planning horizon by establishing a continuum of geographic zones determined by factors that include previously adopted management plans, water and natural resource data, existing recreational amenities and demands, adjacent land uses and public input. Land Use and Management Plans are created to maximize the quality of experience for recreationists and other users in ways that are compatible with the protection and sustainability of water resources and related natural systems. This executive summary provides a brief description of the property, summarizes the analysis and findings contained within the formal land use and management plan, and identifies programmatic accomplishments and goals for the relevant planning horizons.

Potts Preserve at a Glance

Potts Preserve is located along the northwest border of Citrus County ([Figure 1](#)) within the Withlacoochee River watershed. Acquisition of lands within the Preserve began in 1988. It is part of a contiguous 122,000-acre core of protected public conservation/recreation lands and was primarily acquired to protect, restore and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water and wetland systems of the state; and for natural flood control and water detention. While several references and depictions in this Land Use and Management Plan may appear to represent the Preserve as more than 9,300 acres, the area within the project limits is, in fact, a mosaic of lands owned and managed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District and lands held in trust by the State of Florida under the designation of sovereign submerged lands.

Potts Preserve includes 4 miles of frontage along the Withlacoochee River which is designated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as an Outstanding Florida Water. The Preserve is comprised of mesic hammock and other forested uplands that total 3,742 acres with 1,533 acres of pasture and other lands covering the remainder of the uplands. The remainder of Potts Preserve and interwoven state lands consists of basin marsh, swamp and other wetland communities. Important natural resources and their ecological significance are summarized in the Water and Natural Resource Data Section of this plan.

The Preserve has a rich historic and prehistoric past. Early accounts from the Seminole Wars indicate that the elevated hammocks along the Withlacoochee River and along the east and west sides of the Tsala Apopka Lake system served as settlement locales for the Seminole Indians and earlier native populations and as sites for their fields. Several archeological sites scattered throughout the Preserve have been identified, are preserved under the guidelines of the state's Division of Historical Resources and are further protected by the District's ownership. Historical

uses of the Preserve include cattle grazing, turpentining, logging and hunting. Today, there is a variety of recreational opportunities compatible with the natural communities present at the Preserve including bicycling, birding, backpacking, equestrian riding, hiking, hunting, geocaching, interpretive uses, nature study and photography.

Planning Process

Governing Board Policy 610-3 requires that District conservation lands be managed for water supply, natural systems, public access, recreation and education, biodiversity, archaeological resources and forestland. Governing Board Procedure 61-3 provides the framework to implement Policy 610-3 and to evaluate appropriate land management activities and recreation opportunities on District lands. The process includes the following steps:

- Review the previously adopted management plan
- Verify water and natural resource data
- Delineate management zones
- Review regional recreational supply and demand
- Complete land use matrix
- Obtain public input

The formal land use and management plan includes a comprehensive discussion about the natural systems and data evaluated during the development of this plan. This information, combined with information from previous plans is used to delineate management zones. These zones are established to protect and preserve sensitive natural communities, imperiled plant and wildlife populations, and several ongoing restoration projects. Before the land use and management zone map is finalized, District staff conduct a regional recreation assessment to identify nearby recreational opportunities offered by other recreation providers including state and local governments. Additionally, staff inventory the resource-dependant recreation opportunities within the 20-mile radius of the Preserve and identify demographic trends that are likely to influence recreation demands.

The land use and management zones established for the Potts Preserve were incorporated into a matrix that contains a broad range of resource-dependant recreation activities and renewable resource land uses. Consistent with preservation objectives, only those resource-based recreation activities that require minimal amenities and can still have a quality recreation experience were considered compatible as depicted in [Table 1](#). The full regional assessment that identifies public lands that are connected to or within proximity of the Preserve available for public use indicates that any future demands for resource-dependant recreation in the region for the next 15 years can be fulfilled by existing recreation opportunities.

Based on the intrinsic character of the Preserve, existing and proposed recreational opportunities on public lands within the region, and limitations on the Preserve, the existing trail network and designated uses at the Preserve are satisfactory and appropriate to provide users with a quality passive recreation experience. The location and type of uses are depicted in [Figure 2](#). District staff will continue to monitor future demands in the region for compatible resource-based opportunities that may be compatible at the Preserve.

Figure 1. – Location and Regional Conservation Corridor Links

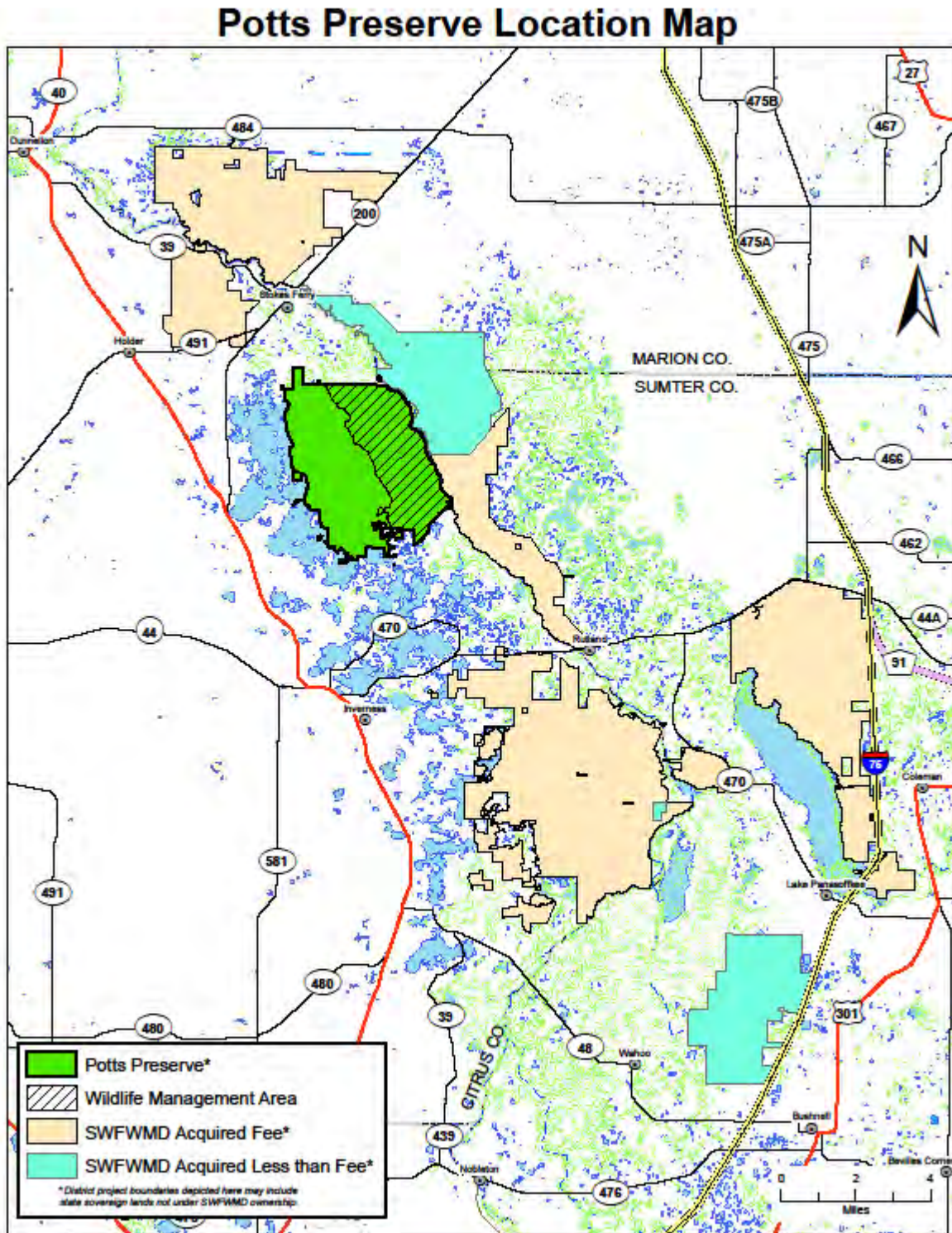


Figure 2. Potts Preserve Recreation and Zone Map

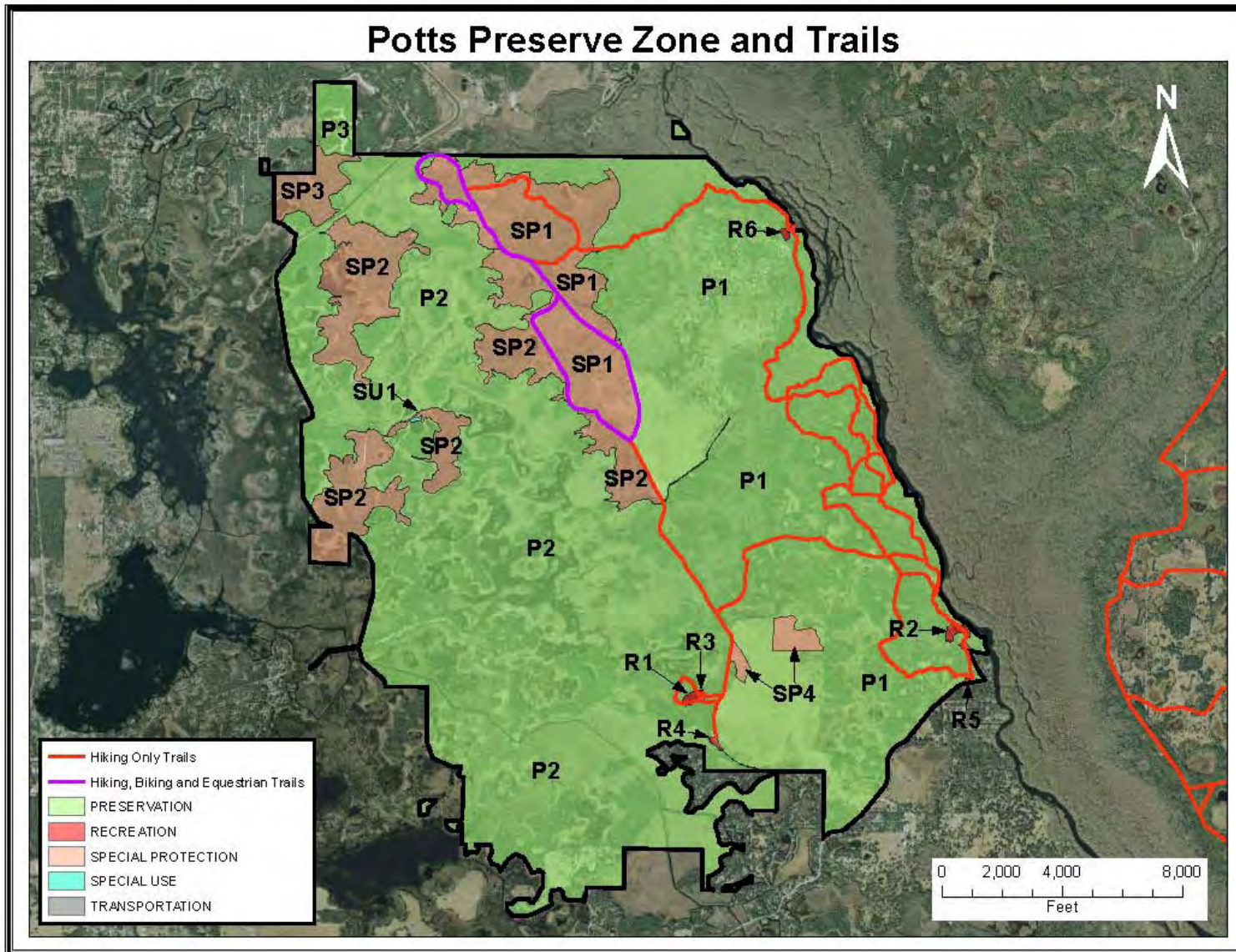


Table 1. Land Use Matrix for Potts Preserve

Land Use Categories	Resource-Dependant Recreation															
	Mobility-impaired access	Access-Walkthrough	Access-5 vehicle maximum	Access->5 vehicles	Bicycling- Unimproved dirt trail	Birdwatching	Camping-Backpacking	Camping-Group	Equestrian	Hiking	Geocaching	Interpretive areas or trails	Nature Viewing	Nature Photography	Non-Wildlife Management Area Hunting	Wildlife Management Area
Management Zones																
Preservation 1		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Preservation 2		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Preservation 3						✓				✓			✓	✓		
Special Protection 1		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Special Protection 2		✓			✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Special Protection 3						✓				✓			✓	✓		
Special Protection 4		✓				✓				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Recreation 1		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Recreation 2		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recreation 3		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Recreation 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recreation 5		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recreation 6		✓				✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		
Special Use 1										✓	✓		✓	✓		

Accomplishments and Goals

The current Land Use and Management Plan guides the use and management of Potts Preserve throughout the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020. This Executive Summary describes the accomplishments that occurred from 1999 to 2010 and the goals identified for 2010 to 2020. The various goals and accomplishments are listed according to the corresponding management-related program. Additionally, District staff has identified external factors that have the potential to impede appropriate management and use of District lands.

Resource Protection and Security Program

Accomplishments

- Entered into contract for security services to patrol lands and provide information and other support to the public.
- Installed and currently maintain approximately 6.6 miles of boundary fencing.

Goals

- Continue to identify and address security issues at Potts Preserve.
- Establish strategy to address areas prone to vandalism and unauthorized uses. Implement and adjust strategy as needed. Achieve maintenance-level status.
- Assess all fencing along the boundary to ensure compliance with legal requirements, and replace/install fencing as necessary. Continuously evaluate effectiveness of security and adapt as appropriate.

Public Use Program

Accomplishments

- Designated and marked 30 miles of hiking and multiple use trails and 12 miles of equestrian trails. Twenty miles of trail designated for hiking only are maintained by the Florida Trail Association.
- Coordinated with the Citrus County Airboat Alliance to establish picnic/recreation area accessible only from sovereign lands.
- Entered into a use agreement with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to establish Potts Preserve as a Wildlife Management Area.
- Entered into agreement with the Florida Trail Association for management of a segment of the Florida Trail through Potts Preserve.
- Acquired access easement in northwest area of the Preserve for management and maintenance activities.

Goals

- Evaluate recreational amenities to ensure accurate information is presented in periodic Recreation Guide updates.
- Increase volunteer activity focusing on recreational amenities and resource management services.
- Schedule public speaking engagements and field trips with adjacent and potentially impacted residential communities and user groups to educate residents and users on resource management activities, particularly ongoing restoration, exotic species control and

prescribed fire application. Develop relationships with neighbors and user groups to facilitate communication and feedback loops on management activities.

- Enhance monitoring program for recreational use areas and trails. Establish methods to most effectively monitor proper use of trails, number of users, effectiveness and success of public access points to accommodate users.
- Monitor use of adjacent sovereign lands to determine level of impacts on District lands.
- Monitor trail use in area affected by the berm removal completed in 2010 to determine if desired use of inundated area changes.
- Determine level of secondary impacts that result from public use of Potts Preserve and implement steps to reverse impacts. Refine monitoring protocols and utilize data to ensure protection of the resource.

Land Maintenance Program

Accomplishments

- Stabilized roads as needed.
- Installed culverts as needed.
- Conducted boundary surveys to resolve encroachments.
- Mapped and continue standard maintenance of all roads, firebreaks, gates, culverts, and associated infrastructure.
- Removed berm road previously linking several upland islands in western area of the Preserve for restoration purposes.
- Established agreement for maintenance of Dee River Road.

Goals

- Coordinate with local power company to remove old power lines and converter boxes.
- Remove former ranger residence.

Fire Management Program

Accomplishments

- 13,757 acres burned with approximately 40% conducted in the growing season. Burn units are generally on a 3-4 year rotation.

Goals

- Obtain necessary authorization from the DEP for use of heavy equipment in sovereign lands to conduct fire line construction and maintenance.
- Burn scrub restoration units as needed and apply mechanical preparation as needed.
- Conduct priority marsh burns west of Main Road when conditions are suitable.

Exotic Species Control Program

Accomplishments

- Instituted a systematic invasive species control program targeting exotic flora.
- A total of \$9,935 has been spent since 1998 to treat a variety of exotic plants occurring on the property.

Goals

- Survey for, and treat as necessary, Category I and II exotics following removal of berm sections on Loop Road and Middle Loop Road. Focus will be on roads, haul routes and fill disposal areas.
- Implement feral hog trapping program.
- Achieve maintenance level status for treatment of Chinese tallow.
- Assess District's exotics control program and, if necessary, take practicable measures to maximize effectiveness.

Water Resources and Natural Communities Restoration Program

Accomplishments

- Contracted with Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), Florida State University, to map existing and historic natural communities, quantify current conditions, and record observed plant and wildlife species.
- Completed removal of approximately 0.8 miles of elevated roads bisecting wetlands to restore hydrology.
- Completed removal of remnant bridge and causeway material from an area known as Parson's Point that historically connected the property to the town of Hernando.
- Completed approximately 721 acres of mechanical restoration in upland plant communities (scrub, scrubby flatwoods, and mesic flatwoods).

Goals

- Complete mechanical treatment of remaining scrub restoration units.
- Complete selective follow-up treatment of overgrown hardwoods.
- Develop strategy to identify and conduct joint upland restoration and habitat enhancement projects utilizing combined expertise of District and FWC staff.

Resource Utilization Program

Accomplishments

- Completed 200 acre pine thinning for restoration in December 2000 that generated \$25,989.73 in revenue.
- Continue to evaluate/explore potential for resource management activities to generate revenue, in ways that are renewable, to offset management costs.

Resource Monitoring Program

Accomplishments

- Initiated Florida scrub-jay monitoring. Program includes regular surveys to detect new occurrences, presence of juveniles, territory size and population estimates, and banding of individuals for long-term tracking.
- Completed gopher tortoise burrow surveys in approximately 50% of suitable habitat (scrub, scrubby flatwoods, xeric hammock; xeric pastures and old fields).
- Implemented gopher tortoise burrow surveys in areas of sub-optimal habitat, especially in mesic hammocks occurring on well-drained soils.
- Assisted Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) staff with locations of rare plant populations.

- Worked with botanists to identify, map, and monitor numerous rare plant populations including state listed species and several tracked by FNAI.

Goals

- Achieve maintenance level status with regard to banding of Florida scrub-jays.
- Assess status of gopher tortoise population in the Point Lonesome Grove area located in southwest corner of the Preserve and on upland islands on west side of the Preserve.
- Complete GIS mapping of gopher tortoise locations in all suitable habitat.

Challenges to Achieving Goals

There are several key factors external to the District that could significantly affect the achievement of long-term goals described in this plan. Below is a summary of external factors that may affect or influence future management of Potts Preserve.

- Funding for land use and management expenses susceptible to changes in District budget and allocation of land management funds.
- Exotic flora and fauna that originate offsite and infest Potts Preserve.
- Increasing restrictions with regard to exotic plant and animal treatments, such as herbicide application restrictions.
- Difficulty of access to western portion of the property for resource monitoring, prescribed burning, and wildfire suppression due to removal of berm sections of the Loop Road.
- Narrow windows for conducting marsh burns due to exacting conditions required for effectiveness and smoke management.
- Absentee property owners adjacent to the Preserve contributing to unauthorized access issues.
- Legal impediments and policy shifts affecting fire management, such as increasing air quality standards.
- Development adjacent to or in proximity to the Preserve may impact resources and ecosystem processes within the property.
- Land use practices of adjacent landowners affecting the property's resources.
- Natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, climate change and disease that potentially cause unrecoverable resource losses and affect the long-term balance and viability of populations and functionality.
- New construction or expansion of primary roads, highways or other development that impact habitat and buffers and affect fire management practices.

This executive summary is designed as a companion to the full, comprehensive land use and management plan. It provides a brief description of the property, summarizes the analysis and findings contained within the formal land use and management plan, and identifies programmatic accomplishments and goals for the relevant planning horizons. A detailed land use and management plan is available upon request.